

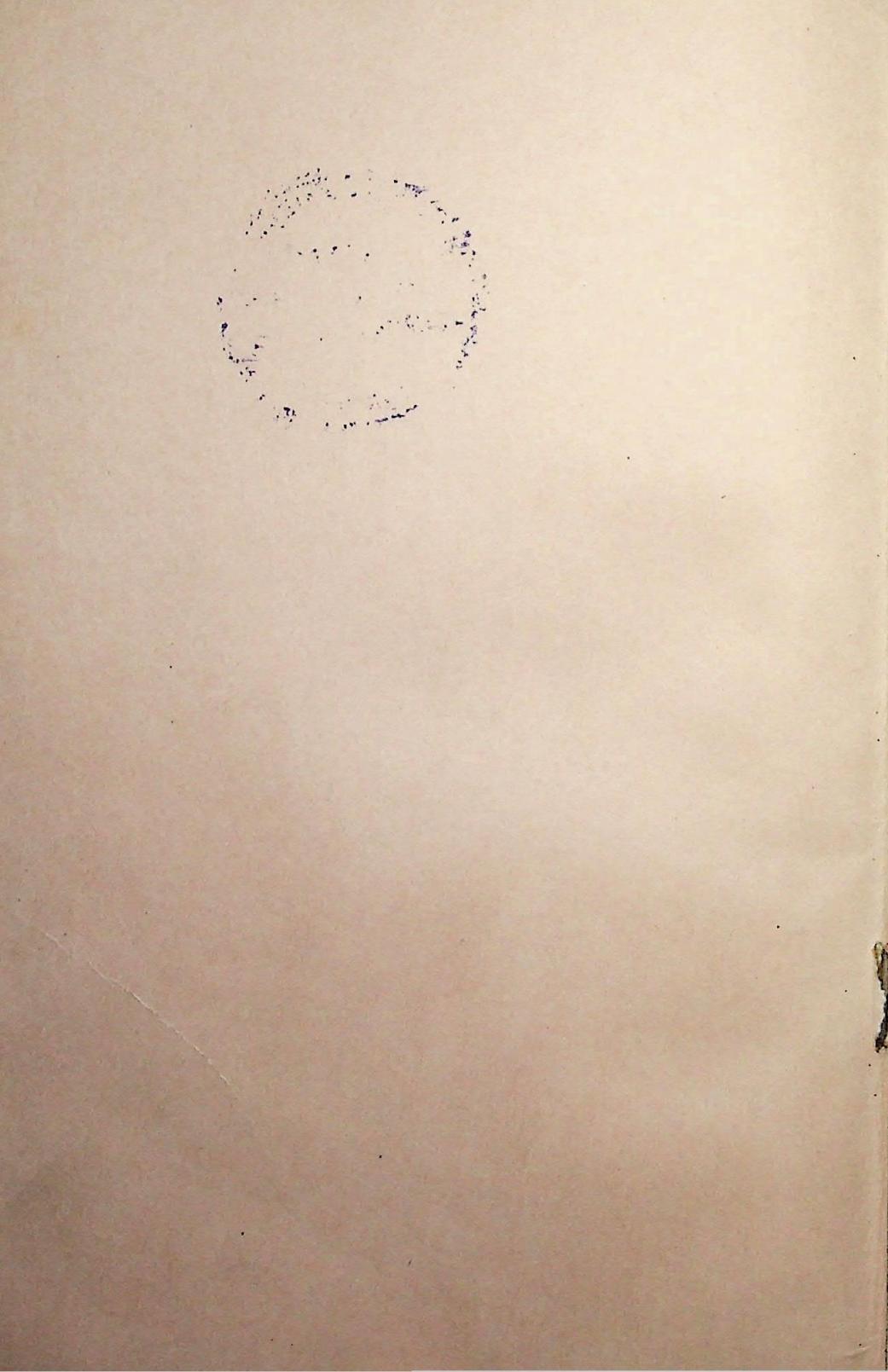
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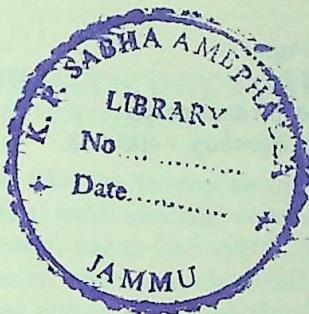
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Sufi - Ramakrishna Study Series III
(Concluding Session)

Further proceedings of
The conference
of the birds and a Swan :
(Sufism in the light of Sri Ramakrishna)
Path-Way to God
(Sadhana)

By
Ananda





Offered to
'Dear Mother'
in profound love and deep respect
for the interest created and enthusiasm
provided in such field of studies

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Series III

SADHANA—THE PATH WAY TO GOD. CONCLUDING SESSION.

Atlast finding someone like the twenty second bird who was really interested in the spiritual path and had very earnestly asked "...some help from Hoopoe to reach out to God (SIMURGH)", the wise bird Hoopoe started the discussion very enthusiastically by saying that there are seven Valleys to cross and finally reach the God but that no one has ever come back into the world who has made this journey however there is nothing to be afraid of for undertaking such a Journey.

Once Sri Ramakrishna said: "None but Isvarakotis can return to the plane of relative consciousness after attaining samadhi."

THE FIRST VALLEY : QUEST

The first valley is the "VALLEY OF QUEST" and according to Hoopoe: "One who enters here will be filled with such longing that he will give himself up completely to the quest symbolized by this valley. He will ask of his cup-bearer a draught of wine and when he has drunk it nothing else will matter except the true pursuit of his true aim. Then he will no longer fear the dragons, the guardians of the door, which seek to devour him. When the door is opened and he enters, then dogma, belief and unbelief - all cease to exist."

It is observed by Mahindranath Gupta, a disciple and author of "GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA" that "Shri Ramakrishna was standing still, surrounded by a few devotees and Narendra was singing. M. had never heard anyone except the Master sing so sweetly. When he looked at Sri Ramakrishna he was struck with wonder: for the Master stood motionless, with eyes transfixed. He seemed not even to breathe. A devotee told M. that the Master was in samadhi. M. had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder he thought: 'Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world

in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state:"(Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Page 89)

This longing for the 'quest' (of God/Simurgh - high up in the Valley) 'giving himself up completely' is nothing but another name for renunciation. But this is not renunciation of the negative kind as it is commonly and erroneously understood may be due to the Advaitic (Vedantic) overtone of knowledge. In this respect Sufi renunciation is nearer rather akin to Bhakti School of renunciation as it is based on God-love since it is an emotionally and psychologically feed-back renunciation and not just the dry stoking up of fire in the superficial and abstract knowledge. It is nothing short than 'Giving himself up completely to the quest symbolized by this Valley' as described by Hoopoe. It is nothing but a discrimination that arises in our minds between things permanent and those that are transient. God alone is permanent and so the quest for this God alone then becomes the object - nay, a cause worthy of giving up all the objects of enjoyment both here and here-after - excepting God. In Vedantic language this renunciation is giving up of the garland of flowers, sandal-paste and sex pleasures since these are all transitory being the results of action, an utter disregard for all these is renunciation. In short renunciation is the total abdication of all fruits of action both pleasurable and sorrowful in this world and hereafter. This quest is really seeking for a dispassion for all that is wordly and mundane and a pursuit for the purest of passions that is called as the quest for God.

The word 'quest' does not mean or is limited to the search of an ordinary mind plagued by doubts and vacillations. It is a search for a mind that is fixed or 'set' already for the particular purpose to be attained and which entitles an all out endeavour towards that goal. This one-pointed determination to seek God, His grace leads to the yearning for God. According to Sri Ramakrishna: 'It begets yearning for God. It begets love of God. Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning.' This yearning for God when accentuated by the company of holy persons and prayer becomes the 'quest for God'. This yearning when intensified a little becomes the 'quest' The Master further stated that finally 'It begets love of God' (Ibid page

96) Incidentally the 'Love of God' happens to be next item on our agenda or item that we shall take up after this subject of 'Quest'.

So yearning or in its purified form 'Quest' comes first and as Sri Ramakrishna has said: "Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning... the soul becomes restless for God. This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has some one ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again one should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work." (Ibid)

This yearning or the state of 'quest' has been vividly described by Sri Ramakrishna: once when asked by one of his disciples as to 'what kind of yearning gives one this blissful state of mind' he replied: "One feels restless for God when one's soul longs for His vision. The Guru said to the disciple 'Come with me. I shall show you what kind of longing will enable you to see God' saying this, he took the disciple to a pond and pressed his head under the water. After a few moments he released the disciple and asked 'How did you feel' The disciple answered: 'Oh, I felt as if I were dying! I was longing for a breath of air.' (Ibid Page 497) Similarly one can recollect other instances of this yearning like that of Yashoda's yearning to child Gopala, Sri Ramakrishna's yearning for the vision of Divine Mother etc. etc.

It is said that to succeed in this 'Quest' one should give up everything; renounce everything completely. However the question that confronts every seeker of God is how to give up completely everything in the quest of God. Let us see what Sri Ramakrishna has to say on this: Once somebody asked him 'What is the way to dry up the craving for worldly pleasures?' to which the Master replied: "Pray to the Divine Mother with a longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment to 'woman and gold' It happens instantly if you think of Her as your own mother. She is by no means a godmother. She is your own mother. With a yearning heart persist in your demands on Her. The child holds to the skirt of its mother and begs a penny of her to buy a kite. Perhaps the

mother is gossiping with her friends. At first she refuses to give the penny and says to the child: 'No you can't have it. Your daddy has asked me not to give you money. When he comes home I'll ask him about it. You will get into trouble if you play with a kite now'. The child begins to cry and will not give up his demand. Then the mother says to her friends: 'excuse me a moment. Let me pacify this child'. Immediately she unlocks the cash box with a click and throws the child a penny." (Ibid P. 629)

On another instance talking about the intensity of this yearning he said: ". . . the sum and substance of the whole matter is that man must love God, must be restless for Him. You may or may not believe in God with form or in God without form. You may or may not believe that God incarnates Himself as a man. But you will realize Him if you have the yearning. Then He Himself will let you know what He is like. If you must be mad, be mad for God alone." Such ecstatic love Sri Ramakrishna found in Gopis, who "were seized with divine madness at the very sight of the black tamala tree. Separation from Krishna created such a fire of anguish in Radha's heart that it dried up even the tears in her eyes! Her tears would disappear into steam. There were other times when nobody could notice the depth of her feeling. People do not notice the plunge of an elephant in a big lake." (Ibid P. 449)

Amongst all the episodes narrated by the Master so far, the most akin to the philosophy of Sufism is the one which describes a person seized by 'divine madness'. He often repeated that if one has to be mad he should be mad about God and held out the unique love of Gopis to Lord Krishna. However Sufis could neither tolerate nor sought any help or inspiration from the opposite sex in their pursuit of spiritual sadhana externally. But their love to the Lord was a form of intense love from within, a pure attitude unalloyed by the desires of any kind towards the soul or God. Purity, of mind and heart was the focal point of their spiritual aspiration. How interesting it is to note the similarity of Sri Ramakrishna's views on this subject. He once told a gathering at the Brahmo Samaj: ". . . God is unknown to the mind attached to worldly objects. God is known by the mind and intellect that are pure

..... After the purification of the heart one obtains divine love. Then one sees God, through His grace"

However the Sufis also believed, like the Gopis that: "On the way of self-perfection a man must not loiter even for an instant. If he should stop for a moment working on himself he will slip back" One who is familiar with the Indian tradition will note that this point is very much emphasized by the Gurus and is termed as NIRANTARA or NAIRANTARYA (i.e. constant, continuous or without a gap).

Finally, before getting ready to enter the next valley, the VALLEY OF LOVE let us know what Yussuf Hamdam (a Sufi Seer) has to tell us: "In the spiritual way, both love and hope are necessary, If you do not have these you had better give up the quest. Man must try to be patient. But is a lover ever patient? Be patient and strive with hope to find some one who will show you the way. Keep yourself within yourself and do not let exterior life capture you."

Similarly in the famous Sufi story of Abu Said, Manneh declared that: "Great patience is necessary for those who suffer: but no one is patient. When the Quest is diverted from the inner to the outer, even if it should extend over the universe, in the end it will be unsatisfying. He who is not engaged in the quest of the inner life is no more than an animal - what shall I say? He does not even exist - he is a non-entity, a form without a soul.

How much one is tempted to recall the famous saying of Sri Ramakrishna when he said that only this quest of God and God realisation is the sole purpose of human life and nothing else.

Rabiah puts the whole thing in a nut-shell when hearing a man praying: 'O Lord, open a door that I may come to you' says: 'O, idiot! Is the door shut?'

THE SECOND VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF LOVE

The wise bird Hoopoe continued: "The next valley is the VALLEY OF LOVE. To enter it one must be a flaming fire - what shall I say? A

man must himself be fire. The face of the lover must be inflamed, burning and impetuous as fire. True love knows no after-thoughts; with love, good and evil cease to exist.... In this Valley, love is represented by fire, and reason smoke. When love comes reason disappears. Reason cannot live with the folly of love: love has nothing to do with human reason. If you are possessed with some inner insight, the atoms of the visible world would be manifested to you. But if you look at things with the eye of reason you will never understand how necessary it is to love. Only a man who has been tested and is free can feel this. He who undertakes this journey should have a thousand hearts so that he can sacrifice one at every moment."

To describe the intensity of such love Montique Uttair paints the picture with words of a burning Laila trying to reach her lover Majnun in a sheep-skin in the desert; the intensity of her love is no less than that of a Fakir or a Devrish to his Beloved. The comment that follows is most apt: "Love should tear aside your prudence. Love changes your attitudes. To love is to give up your ordinary life and forsake your tawdry pleasures". At this juncture one is tempted to recount another story in which a proud king calls a Dervish a beggar. The Dervish unfazed replied "Although you call me a beggar, I am not inferior to you in the play of love. Love and poverty go together. You are the sovereign and your heart is luminous: but for love a burning heart like Mine is necessary. Your love is of common place. I suffer from the pain of absence: you are with your beloved, but in love one must know how to endure the pain of absence". On hearing this the Sultan got annoyed and once again snubbed the pious Dervish: "Poor Devrish, you boast of your poverty, but where is your evidence?" Incensed by the words of the Sultan the Dervish declared: "If I sacrifice everything for love, that is taken of my spiritual poverty. And if you, O Mahmud, ever had the experience of real love sacrifice your love for it, if not you have no right to speak of Love". So saying, the Devrish died and the world was plunged into darkness for sometime!

But these are all: "... allegorical presentation of abstract sufferings caused by love and separation and the description of the miracles done by sincere love in winning over the obstacles. Yet all these have

come out so exceedingly dominant that they eclipse the mystic background altogether." This comment of Dr. S. R. Sharda in his book on 'SUFI THOUGHT' (Pub: M. Manoharlal) seems to be very apt and justified. Since this topic will be taken up separately for discussion, let us skip over once more and come back to the subject of 'LOVE' as Sufi Sadhana.

How rightly it is said: "Love is the status of the Pirs and the faquires. . . whosoever adopts it in the Garden of his heart it has blossomed." (Varis, Heer: Verse I) And as Hafiz Barkhurdar has also said: "The oneness of the Universe belongs to the One, the Absolute, the state of darkness. As soon as the flame of love blew up, there was an uproar in the night of darkness. God Himself is the first lover and Mohammad His Beloved. Love is the cause of the world. The animals, the birds or the human beings - none of them is without love." (Yusuf Zulaikhan, verses 91- 92).

Truly, this aspect of the Sufi love has been further explained in 'The Dramatic Universe' by J. G. Bennett (Page 101):- "Love is the instrumental value by which the whole universe is held together in a nexus of holy relationships. Love as an Universal value must come after Holiness. Love without holiness is little more than the relationship of concern or that of participation, neither of which has an Universal character. As with Holiness, love is both good and a virtue. Here the instrumental condition is identical with its own source. There cannot be ineffectual love, though love may be unsuccessful in the sense that the fulfilment it seeks may not be perfectly attained. Love is the value associated with the unitive Energy by which the entire activity of the universe is co-ordinated and sustained.

Accordingly, "It seems appropriate to take unity or love as the masculine and Holiness or Purity as the feminine of instrumental value. In the Sufi cosmology, which has an affinity with that of the gnostics on the one side and that of the Babylonians on the other, there are two Universal spirits, the Pure spirit which is the Holiness of God and the Spirit of Love called ASHQ. The working of these two spiritual

powers bring about redemption of the world. This does not seem to be at variance with the concept of love as the penultimate value."

Then naturally, "It remains to ask ourselves how Cosmic love is related to our human experience of love. It is by love that the Selfhood is united with the individuality. This union is the first step towards the realization of the universal love by which the human is united with the Divine." Thus "When love is seated and centered within the true Self, it is a projection of the Universal Love that can be free from distortion, though inevitably diminished in scope and intensity."

In the analysis of this cosmic love it is interesting to note the views of Benett who has sought to describe the four types of love which almost covers the entire concept of love. According to him love may be: (1) material (2) reactional (3) divided and finally the (4) the love of True Self. The love of the material-self is bound by the concepts of gain and loss, that is to say limitations and hence it 'cannot reach beyond the value of hope'. While the second, the love of the reactional-self comes from dis-satisfaction and the need for security! It is psychological love as compared with the material love - which is physical in nature. Then comes the love of the divided-self which although authentic falls short of union or the real unity. Therefore only the True-self of man can know union and so produce the working of the Universal Love.

It is said that mostly in the normal state of any ordinary person, consciousness merges into his sensitivity. "When this happens he loses the power to see himself and watch his own activity. The theoretical source then dries up and man is dominated by the material and re-actional selves. The separation of consciousness and sensitivity is therefore, the key to the right working This separation is called by Gurdjieff 'self remembering'. In the much admired psychology of the Greek fathers, as preserved in the Philokalia, it is called neepsis or sobriety and is said to be the condition sine qua non of successful prayer. It is obtained by the practice of Satipattahank (chastening of the mind) or mindfulness which is the principal exercise of the Theravada Buddhists. Indeed this separation is universally recognised to be a necessary condition but few know how to attain it." (Ibid P. 40) From

this separation comes a purity born out of tranquility i.e., consciousness minus physical sensitivity or sensousness. A controlled state of mind, so to say, tranquil mind and love comes after a hot and burning state generally. Amongst the Sufis there is a joke known as 'sleeping love'. It must be a joke only for there cannot be anything like that. According to the joke it is said that ". . . by the day he measures the wind: at night his burning heart lights up his face with the brightness of the moon" - ever burning and alert till he reaches a tranquil state indeed !

No doubt love is the key-note of Sufism and it is God-Love from the beginning to the end, nothing else either in the begining or in the middle. Very similar to the Upanishads where one is told that Brahman is the source for everything, for other than Brahman - nothing else is there: and to Brahman alone everything returns ultimately. Brahman meaning here ultimate consciousness. Sufism proceeds further and ventures to declare emphatically: 'Love is the root cause of the universe', 'love is the basis of the continuance of the universe!' 'through love the separated Divine element retraces back to God, the original and permanent abode of man': 'everybody is burning in the fire lighted by love' : 'love is the essence of not only the existence but also of God.' etc.

The poet expresses himself in verse when he says:

Love leads to the realization of Haqq:

I am sacrifice unto Love:

Those who are killed by love never die:

Love is the religion of saints and the porphets

If thou wantest to enjoy the bliss of Love

adopt the path of Faqr.

(From Muqbal, Heer, Verse 2)

Sri Ramakrishna had taken this path of God-love and he was so mad with this God-love that he felt that his body would be destroyed by a kind of burning sensation during his sadhana days. He described his experience: " . . . a burning sensation came on the body from the beginning of the Sadhana. It increased by degrees and became unbearable." "We were further told that any diminution of his constant experience of the Divine Mother's presence and absorption in Her, filled him with a poignant sense of separation which made him throw himself violently on the ground, rub his face against it and fill the quarters with loud wailings. He would struggle for life and his breath would almost stop. He could take no notice of the fact that his whole body was getting cut and bruised and covered with blood . . . immediately after-wards, when he again got the vision of the Mother, that mental attitude of his vanished. His face then beamed with joy and he became a different person altogether" (SRI RAMKRISHNA THE GREAT MASTER, page 174) Although he suffered intensely whenever he was unable to get the vision of the Divine Mother he experienced at the same time a kind of immense joy due to his intense love of God in each and every pore of his body. His joy was so deep that he could not understand how people could run after money, property, name and fame and other material and sensuous things like mad people. He was surprised that people were seldom or never mad after that which is Divine, the Supreme purpose of love and the goal of life.

Emphasising his view point Sri Ramakrishna himself narrated various incidents. "Radha was mad with Prema - the ecstatic love of God. But there is also the madness of bhakti. Hanuman's was such. When he saw Sita entering the fire he was going to kill Rama. Then too, there is the madness of knowledge. I once saw a jnani behaving like a madman. He came here very soon after the temple garden was dedicated. People said he belonged to the Brahmo Sabha of Rammohan Roy. He had a torn shoe on one foot, a stick in one hand, and a potted mango-plant in the other. After a dip in the Ganges he went to the Kali temple where Haladhari was seated. With great fervour he began to chant a hymn to the Divine Mother. Then he went up to a dog, held it by the ear and ate some of its food. The dog didn't mind. Just at that time I too was about to experience the state of divine madness. I threw

my arm around Hriday's neck and said: "Oh, Hride! Shall I too fall into that plight?"

The Master continued: "I became mad. Narayan Sastri came here and saw me roaming about with a bamboo pole on my shoulder. He said to the people 'Ah, he is mad!' In that state I could not observe any caste restrictions. The wife of a low caste man used to send me cooked greens and I ate them. I touched my head and lips with the leaf-plates from which the beggars ate their food in the guest-house of the Kali temple. Thereupon Haladhari said to me: 'What have you done? You have taken the food left by beggars. How will you marry off your children?' These words aroused my anger. Haladhari was my cousin, older than myself. But could that restrain me? I said to him: 'You wretch! Isn't it you who take pride in the study of the Gita and Vedanta? Isn't it you who teach people that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory? And yet you imagine that I shall beget children? May your mouth that recites from the Gita be blighted!"

Turning to 'M' he said: "..... you see mere study of books avails nothing. One may recite the written part for the drum glibly from memory but to play the drum is exceedingly difficult." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna page 548/9)

When one of the devotees - Bhavanath lamented his difficulty in turning his mind towards God-love Sri Ramakrishna was all compassion and instructed him lovingly: "Try at the outset to talk to HIM (God) and establish a friendly relationship with HIM. If you fail inspite of your efforts; then don't give another thought. Take refuge in God. Meditate on HIM. There is no use in giving up God and feeling depressed from thinking about others." While asking Bhavanath to pursue without a break the Master further said: "Love you must because God dwells in all beings. But salute a wicked person from a distance. You speak of Chaitanya? He also used to restrain his spiritual feelings in the presence of un-sympathetic people. At Srivas's house he put Srivas's mother-in-law out of the room, dragging her out by the hair...." On being pointed out that it was not Sri Chaitanya himself who did it the Master replied almost immediately: "Could the others

have done it without his approval? What can be done? Suppose a man cannot make another love him, must he worry about it day and night . . . which should be given to God, on useless things?" (Ibid P. 572)

Sri Ramakrishna's message to one and all can be summed up as: "Live in the world, but in order to realize God, hold fast to HIS lotus feet with one hand and with the other do your duties, when you get a respite from your duties, cling to God's lotus feet with both hands - live in solitude and meditate on HIM and serve HIM ceaselessly"

Master's line of thought about God-love tallied very much with that of the Sufi's; he argued in the same Sufi manner against the socalled reason and people's obsession to believe only that which was proved by facts and figures; he said "God cannot be realized through scholarship. Who, indeed, can understand the things of the Spirit through reason" Infinite are the glories of God: How little can you fathom them. . . your philosophy is mere speculation. It only reasons. God cannot be realized that way . . . God cannot remain unmoved if you have raga-bhakti (God- love), that is love of God with passionate attachment to HIM. Do you know how fond God is of HIS devotee's love? It is like the cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil-cake. The cow gobbles it down greedily."

Sri Ramakrishna was very particular as how a devotee should love God, how intense this love should be and how God should be loved for the sake of God-love and never in expectation of some favour in return. He told his devotees: "Raga-bhakti is pure love of God, a love that seeks god alone and not any worldly end. Prahlada had it. Suppose you go to a wealthy man every day but you seek no favour from him, you simply love to see him. If he wants to show you favour, you say: 'No, Sir, I don't need anything. I came just to see you.' Such is love of God for its own sake. You simply love God and don't want anything from HIM in return . . . the gist of the whole thing is that one must develop passionate yearning for God . . ." (IBID. P. 183)

One comes across plenty of such sayings of the Master on this God-love and how near he came to the similar Sufi idea is well illustrated when he said". It is not given to everybody to feel Prema,

ecstatic love of God. Chaitanya experienced it. An ordinary man can at the most experience bhava. Only the Isvarakotis, such as Divine Incarnations experience Prema. When Prema is awakened the devotee not only feels the world to be unreal, but forgets even the body, which everyone loves so intensely. "He continued: In a Persian book it is said that inside the skin is the flesh, inside the flesh the bone, inside the bone the marrow and so on but that Prema is the innermost of all. One becomes soft and tender through Prema Prema is the rope by which you can tether God..... (Ibid Page 502)

According to Sri Ramakrishna love is not only the factor which softens and smoothes the hard and difficult path of spirituality but it is a supreme relationship rather a tying-up with the inner-soul that is God. He cited the example of Chaitanya who "experienced three states of mind. First, the conscious state, when his mind dwelt on the gross and the subtle. Second, the semi-conscious state, when the mind entered the causal body and was absorbed in the bliss of divine intoxication. Third, the inmost state, when his mind merged in the great cause." (Ibid P. 330.)

Although the Master assured that one can realise God through intense love for HIM he also cautioned that: "God cannot be seen with these physical eyes. In the course of spiritual discipline one gets a 'love body' endowed with 'love eyes', 'love ears' and so on. One sees God with those 'love eyes'. One hears the voice of God with those 'love ears' . . . with this 'love body' the soul communes with God. But this is not possible without intense love of God. One sees nothing but God everywhere when one loves HIM with great intensity. It is like a person with jaundice who sees everything yellow. Then one feels that 'I am visibly HE'. It is like a man's seeing flames on all sides, after he has gazed fixedly at one flame for some time." (Ibid Page 115)

THE THIRD VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF UNDERSTANDING

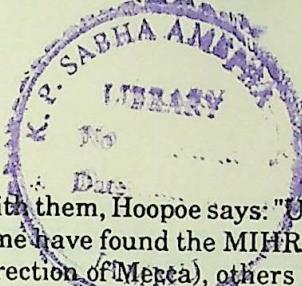
"Next to this Valley of Love" Hoopoe the wise bird said: "Is the VALLEY OF UNDERSTANDING which has neither begining nor end.

No way is equal to this way and the distance to be travelled to cross it is beyond reckoning." From 'love' to 'understanding' the distance is very small. With love, understanding comes, rather with understanding love follows spontaneously, indeed ! And according to Hoopoe "Understanding for each traveller is enduring; but knowledge is temporary" Real knowledge is nothing but understanding. Knowledge in its fulness is understanding.

And Hoopoe explained: "The soul like the body, is in a state of progress or decline; and the spiritual way reveals itself only in the degree to which the traveller has overcome his faults and weaknesses, his sleep and his inertia and each will approach nearer to his aim according to his effort."

According to Sri Ramakrishna real knowledge is a store house of understanding: he said once: "Why should a man of knowledge be afraid of criticism? His understanding is as immovable as the anvil in a blacksmith's shop. Blows from the hammer fall continually on the anvil but cannot affect it in the least." (Ibid Page 783)

Pointing out this subjective side and the creative role that this understanding plays in the individual lives, Hoopoe went on telling: "Even if a gnat was to fly with all its might, could it equal the speed of the wind? There are different ways of crossing this valley, and all birds do not fly alike." Upanishadic traditions of India have also spoken of the various ways through which this goal of life can be achieved. Sri Ramakrishna also has spoken in the same manner about the individual's nature, capacity and freedom to go along the way towards this ultimate Divinity which is One. He never liked one and the same pattern of spiritual life for one and all. He always stressed that each soul has his or her own way of development and growth. Swami Vivekananda, the worthy disciple of Sri Ramakrishna roared: "Each soul is potentially divine, the goal is to manifest the divinity within. Each one of us is naturally growing and developing according to his own nature: each will in time come to know the highest truth, for after all, men must teach themselves.... Each individual has to work out his own solution, there is no other way and so also with the nations".



As if collaborating with them, Hoopoe says: "Understanding can be arrived at variously - some have found the MIHRAB, (niche or slab in mosque, used to show direction of Mecca), others idol." And according to him: "When the sum of understanding brightens this road each receives light according to his merit and he finds the degree assigned to him in the understanding of Truth." The sun reflects more clearly in clear and calm water than over a dirty pond.

Sri Ramakrishna's discussions with his disciples were full of relevant anecdotes of great interest: once while discussing how ones mind should be ready to receive the words of the Guru he said: "It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God. But some water is fit to be used for worship only, some water for washing the face and some only for washing plates or dirty linen. This last sort cannot be used for drinking or for a holy purpose. In like manner, God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all - holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people." He again and again stressed: "What is needed is absorption in God - loving HIM intensely . . . if a man comes to love God, he need not trouble himself much about these activities" Similar were the thoughts of Hoopoe when he said that with the dawning of understanding what happens is: "When the mystery of the essence of being reveals itself clearly to him (the seeker) the furnace of this world becomes a garden of flowers."

Hoopoe was certain that with the accomplishment of right understanding or even with little striving: "... he will be able to see the almond in its hard shell. He will no longer be pre-occupied with himself but will look up at the face of his friend. In each atom he will see this whole; he will ponder over thousands of bright secrets." No matter. "how many have lost their way in this search for one who has found the mysteries! It is necessary to have a deep and lasting wish to become as we ought to be in order to cross this difficult valley. Once you have tasted the secrets you will have a real wish to understand them. But whatever you may attain, never forget the words of the Koran, 'Is there

anything more? Indian scriptural knowledge and spiritual wisdom also says that there is nothing beyond this 'God' or 'Brahman'. *

Sri Ramakrishna drew a very fine and clear distinction between knowledge and understanding and thereby made the whole subject much more clear and lucid than what the Hoopoe bird had to say. For instance he started the whole process by asking himself the vital question faced by each and every seeker: "Can a man ever understand God's ways? I too think God sometimes as good and sometimes as bad. HE has kept us deluded by His great illusion. Sometimes He wakes us up and sometimes He keeps us unconscious. One moment the ignorance disappears and the next moment it covers our mind. If you throw a brick-bat into a pond covered with moss, you get a glimpse of the water. But a few moments later the moss comes dancing back and covers the water."

In the understanding there is a kind of 'fullness' or 'wholeness'; knowledge is like a patch and contradictory to each other. One can say that understanding is matured knowledge since it is not limited to one person or to one thought whereas knowledge is limited in a sense to a particular thing or thought. One day Sri Ramakrishna after listening to the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (it was read out to him by one of his disciples) observed: ". .one is aware of pleasure and pain, birth and death, disease and grief, as long as one is identified with the body. All these belong to the body alone and not to the soul". According to him, only after, "attaining Self knowledge one looks on pleasure and pain, birth and death as a dream." This can be considered as some what like the right understanding or real knowledge, in its wholeness - good/bad or evil etc. The point is without understanding, only sheer knowledge - discursive or even discriminative knowledge, cannot help life. Very appropriately Sri Ramakrishna has posed the question: "How little we know! Can one-seer pot hold ten seers of milk? If ever a

*"I know the great Purusha, who is luminous, like the Sun, and beyond darkness. Only by knowing HIM does one pass over death; there is no other way to the Supreme Goal" (SVETASVATRA UPANISHAD CH.III/8)

salt-doll ventures into the ocean to measure its depth, it cannot come back and give us that information. It melts into the water and disappears." (Ibid. Pg. 257) Later speaking to future Swami Vivekananda he said: ". . . God is beyond the Vedas and their injunctions. Can one realize HIM by studying the scriptures, the Vedas and the Vedanta? Do you understand this? The Vedas give only a hint."

In the common parlance to understand a thing intellectually is knowledge : but really it is not so : real knowledge is the perfect understanding and it is far beyond this intellectual contour of it. So the Master explains that ultimately real knowledge gets softened when it is ripened (matured) or rightly dipped in the syrup of devotion, God-love or faith in the infinite 'self'. He pursued the subject in detail by referring to the epic Mahabharata: "How can we understand the ways of god through our intellect? Many people have spoken about reincarnation, therefore I cannot disbelieve it. As Bhisma lay dying on his bed of arrows, the Pandava brothers and Lord Krishna stood around him. They saw tears flowing from the eyes of the great hero. Arjuna said to Krishna: "Friend, how surprising it is! Even such a man as our grand sire Bhisma - truthful, self-restrained, supremely wise and one of the eight Vasus - weeps through maya, at the hour of death." Sri Krishna asked Bhisma about it. Bhisma replied: "O Krishna, you know very well that this is not the cause of my grief. I am thinking that there is no end to the Pandavas' sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer (meaning Sri Krishna). A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God and so I weep." (Ibid P. 153).

According to Sri Ramakrishna: "He who is a devotee of God must have an understanding that cannot be shaken under any conditions. He must be like an anvil in a black-smith's shop. It is constantly being struck by the hammer, still it is unshaken... Is not it possible to think of God in the midst of the wicked? Just think of the Rishis of ancient times. They used to meditate on God in the forest, surrounded on all sides by tigers, bears and other ferocious beasts. Wicked men have the nature of tigers and bears" (Ibid). Hazra was another instance we find in the Gospel who was always talking against Sri

Ramakrishna. Hence the Master used to pray to the Divine Mother: "Mother, either give him right understanding or take him away from here." He used to often tell Hazra who had a false feeling that he alone knew everything: "Never think that you alone have true understanding and that others are fools. One must love all". He also questioned as to "why should a man of knowledge be afraid of criticism?" However ordinary knowledge or intellectual knowledge cannot do that. It fights but understanding unites. True understanding therefore is love only. As such there is very little contradiction between love and knowledge in this sense.

Sufis like Sri Ramakrishna preferred that type of love or devotion to god which is mixed with the correct proportion of right knowledge. Hence we find the wise bird Hoopoe answering such questions as 'How long must real knowledge continue to be misunderstood ?' by saying: 'This world, this house of sorrows, is in darkness but true knowledge is jewel, it will burn like a lamp and guide you in this gloomy place. If you lag behind you will weep bitter tears. But if you sleep little by night and fast by day, you may find what you seek. Seek then and be lost in the quest.' Sri Ramakrishna also used to give similar instructions to his disciples, specially to such a disciple as Latu Maharaj (who became later Swami Adbhutanandaji) whom he found more devotionally inclined than to be an academic. He asked Latu Maharaj to chant the name of the Lord incessantly. Some of the Master's favourite songs and sayings were almost similar to those of the Sufis for he often used to tell: "This love is a friend to the sentinel, for wakefulness becomes part of him, he who reaches this state will ever be on the watch. Do not sleep, O man, if you are striving for knowledge of yourself. Guard well the fortress of your heart. For there are thieves everywhere. Do not let brigands steal the Jewel you carry. True knowledge will come to him who is awake."

And Latu Maharaj who was one of the first young men to come to Master was born of very poor parents and was engaged by one Ramachandra Dutta as a house-boy. Learning of the saintly Sri Ramakrishna he visited the Master at Dakshineswar along with his employer and was touched to the core by the Master's cordiality and love.

Attracted by the boy's sincerity the Master asked Ramachandra Dutta to allow Latu to stay with him (the Master) permanently to which the disciple readily agreed. Although Latu Maharaj was very fond of kirtan and other devotional songs and made great progress in meditation the Master inspite of great sincere efforts failed to educate him and so he remained all his life illiterate. This Latu Maharaj who later came to be known as Swami Adbhutananda was very much like one of those 'Idiot of Gods' of whom much is said in Sufi literature. There is a story of a devoted Sufi who dared to rebuke Mahmud the Sultan as one who is ignorant and would not be able to realise his goal for "If you know, how you are turned upside down, earth and ashes would not suffice; you would lament without ceasing and put fire in your head."

THE FOURTH VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF INDEPENDENCE AND DETACHMENT

A seeker beginning with the quest, followed by love and understanding, it is very likely that he will be very much stuck- up to his attachment to the object or goal beyond - being completely forgetful of his ultimate goal i.e. 'of his own freedom' And that is what exactly happens. So all sadhana including, Vedantic sadhana prescribes at every step detachment as the key to the success of all practices in the life of a seeker.

Vedanta has dwelt in detail the process of 'detachment' under progressive groups namely (1) SAMA (2) DAMA (3) UPARATI (4) TITIK-SHA etc. However all these are nothing but different kinds and phases of the same act of 'detachment'.

To begin with the first step is 'SAMA' which is the withdrawal of the 'mind' which in Yoga sastra is called 'PRATYAHARA' - of course in a very specific sense. The second is the withdrawal of the senses or control of the senses, the third is Uparati is the cessation of mind to external objects of the world, or cessation of the pursuit for the worldly objects and Titiksha or the fortitude - being unaffected by the pairs of opposite etc. Uparati may also mean the cessation of the pursuit of objects other than That (God) or it may also mean the abandonment

of the prescribed work according to the scriptural injunctions both in the relative as well as in absolute manner.

Actually 'UPARATI' is that state of the mind in which it does not cease to be completely lost and is not affected by the externalities under any circumstances and at any time. Such a kind of withdrawal is the culmination or the final stage of detachment. In fact, Sama, Dama, Uparati, Titiksha, Sraddha and Samadhana are all but the same practices of detachment for Moksha or Liberation according to Vedanta.

Interestingly Hoopoe the wise bird, has described this detachment in a much more simple, composite and direct manner which at the same time is very descriptive also by stating: "Then comes the Valley where there is neither the desire to possess nor the wish to discover. In this state of the soul a cold wind blows, so violent that in a moment it devastates an immense space, the seven oceans are in no way more than a pool, the seven planets a mere spark, the seven heavens a corpse, the seven hells borken ice. Then an astonishing thing happened beyond reason! An ant has the strength of a hundred elephants and a hundred caravan perish while a rook is filling his crop!"

Actually this is a description of the immense power of detachment, in a beautiful poetic language which the Sufis are alone capable of composing to give expression to their various mystic experiences. The idea is to convey the ice cold power of detachment that the bird Hoopoe has used the allegories of the ant and the rook. It is beyond doubt that detachment is much more powerful than attachment and compared to it the power of attachment is so small that it pales into insignificance indeed!

In order to impress once again upon this vastness and intense quality of this detachment, Hoopoe continued his description: "In order that Adam might receive the celestial light, hosts of green-clad angels were consumed by sorrow. So that Noah might become a carpenter of God and build the ark, thousands of creatures perished in water. Myriads of gnats fell on the army of Abrahah so that the King would

be overthrown. Thousands of the first-born died so that Moses might see God. Thousands of people took the Christian girdle so that Christ could possess that secret of God. Thousands of hearts and souls were pillaged so that Muhammad might ascend for one night to heaven. In this Valley nothing old or new has value: you can act or not act."

We find Gita also expresses somewhat similar notion when it describes a state of detachment: "... he has no object in this world (to gain) by doing (an action), nor (does he incur any loss) by the non-performance of action - nor has he (need of) depending on any being or object." (GITA. Chap. III/Sloka 18). Action should be there but there should be no attachment to or expectation from such an action. "One should not unsettle the understanding of the ignorant, attached to action; the wise one (himself) steadily acting, should engage (the ignorant) in all work." (GITA. Chap. III Sloka 26) Like the Valley of detachment, as the Hoopoe bird has said that in such a heaven there is no action or inaction, - only because of this detachment: Gita also proclaimed that: "Actions do not taint Me (Lord Krishna) nor have I any thirst for the result of action. Me thus is not fettered by action" (Ibid. Chap. IV Sloka 14).

Continuing Gita says: "Neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world nor the union with the fruit of action. It is universal ignorance that does it!" (GITA Chap. V Sloka 14) So we can now understand how after understanding detachment comes. Arjuna's understanding was so thickly covered by attachment, attachment to his brothers, attachment to his Gurus, to his relatives etc. that Lord Krishna had to show him His (Lord Krishna's) power and how vast is this Law of Universe and nature - that due to bewilderment alone Arjuna was able to give up all those small and puny weaknesses of attachment to materialistic things; may be one can even dare to say that he was able to do so out of sheer fear and the subsequent submission. The ascent of Muhammad for one night to Heaven, the myriads of gnats falling on the army of Abrahah, the seven heavens and the planets and hell, all mentioned before by Hoopoe pictures the same despair and bewilderment as experienced by Arjuna on the battlefield. Only the magnificent power of detachment can hold up

itself like the proverbial ant before a hundred elephants and hundred caravans which were all destined to perish.

Hoopoe has already spoken how a burning love passing through an understanding alone can reach some sort of tranquility. Now this tranquility is actually transformed into tranquil love, a love beyond all burning and despair when some sense of detachment comes to the suffering mind. It is like the coming of the rosy calm dawn after a terrible dark night. Gita tells what happens when this tranquility comes: "In tranquility all sorrow is destroyed. For the intellect of him, who is tranquil minded is soon established in firmness" (GITA Chap. II Sloka 65) Hoopoe also pointed out that in such a state: ". . . if you saw a whole world burning, until hearts were only like sheesh kababs, it would be only a dream compared to reality. If myriads of souls were to fall into this boundless ocean it would be as a drop of dew. If heaven and earth were to burst into minute particles, it would be no more than a leaf falling from a tree: and if everything was to be annihilated, from the fish to the moon, would there be found in the depths of a pit the leg of a lame ant? If there remains no trace of either men or jinn, the secret of a drop of water from which all has been formed is still to be pondered over."

Because of this attachment only even such heroic persons like Arjuna had to face tumultuous situations and a terrible suffering within. It is no wonder then as to why this fourth Valley is loaded with so much significance: for: "In this Fourth Valley the lightening of Power, which is the discovery of your own resources, of self sufficiency, blazes up so that the heat consumes a hundred worlds. Since hundreds of worlds are reduced to powder, is it strange that yours also will disappear? Atleast on the battlefield of Kurukshetra Arjuna's was about to disappear!

If ever one thinks that one can pass this Valley with ease he is living in a fool's paradise: for "This Valley is not so easy to cross as you in your simplicity perhaps think! Even when the blood of your own heart shall fill the ocean, you will only be able to make the first stage. Even if you were to journey over all the ways of the world you would

still find yourself at the first step. No traveller has seen the limit of this journey neither has he found a remedy for love. If you halt you are petrified or you may even die; if you continue on your way, always advancing, you will hear until eternity the cry: 'Go still further' You can neither go nor stay. It is of no advantage either to live or to die."

Like in the Gita, Hoopoe also advocated 'action' instead of 'inaction' but action with detachment and control over one's self. It said: "In this Valley no one must remain inactive and one must enter it only after having reached a certain stage of development. Now it is time to work instead of living in uncertainty and passing one's time heedlessly. Rouse yourself from apathy, renounce inner and outer attachments and cross this difficult Valley, for if you do not renounce them you will become more heedless than the worshippers of many gods and you will never become self-sufficient.

Sri Ramakrishna also used to narrate a story very much analogous to this point. He spoke of a crow which found a piece of luscious tender meat and flew with the hope of perching on the branch of a tree and enjoying the meal. But to its great annoyance several crows seeking the piece of meat in its beak started following him from all directions and trying to snatch away the piece from him. Now our crow found to his great dismay that if he wished to escape from these crows and have some peace he has to let go the piece of the meat which he did and true to his expectations the pack of crows which surrounded him all this time left him and darted towards the falling piece of meat. Attachment is also like this. Until one allows it to drop off, there is very little peace, this is the universal truth. Continuing on the subject the Master said: "There are four stages of life: brahmacharya, garhashtya, vanaspratha and sanyas. During the first three stages a man has to perform his worldly duties (meaning there is attachment to certain things and ideas etc.) The sannayasi carries only his staff, water-pot and begging bowl. He too must perform certain 'nityakarma' but his mind is not attached to it: he is not conscious of doing such work. . . . If a householder or a man belonging to the other stages of life performs action without attachment, then he is united with God through such Action" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Page 388)

To make the point much more clear the Master compared the detached state of a child by saying: "A child has no attachment to the three Gunas - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. He becomes as quickly detached from a thing as he comes attached to it" At the same time he also remarked that: "without this intense attachment, this passionate love, one cannot realize God". (Ibid Page 198) Swami Vivekananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna echoed the sentiments of his Guru when he said: "Then man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is that there must be as much power of attachment as that of detachment. There are men who are never attracted to anything: they can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic, they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery, the wall never loves, is never hurt, but it is a wall after all!"

Like the Sufis, Swami Vivekananda also emphasized: "Therefore the man who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life, escapes also its joys. We do not want that: that is weakness: that is death. That soul has not been awakened, that never feels weakness, never feels misery: that is a callous state. We do not want that!" Pointing out the right direction he said: "We not only want this mighty power of love, this mighty power of attachment, the power of throwing our whole soul upon a single object, losing ourselves and letting ourselves be annihilated, as it were, for other souls - which is the power of the Gods: but we want to be higher even than the Gods. The perfect man can put his whole soul upon that one point of love, yet he is unattached. How comes this? That is another secret to learn!" (WORK & ITS SECRET Page 9)

While describing the state of mind of a detached person, Sri Ramakrishna compares him to a child - its simplicity and its purity of faith and said: ". . . you can cajole him (the child) out of a cloth worth Five rupees with a doll worth an anna, though at first he may say with great determination: 'No, I won't give it to you. My daddy brought it for me.' Again all the persons are the same to a child. He has no feeling of high and low in regard to persons. So he does not discriminate

against caste. If his mother tells him that a particular man should be regarded as an elder brother, the child will eat from the same plate with him though he may belong to the low cast of a blacksmith. The child does not know hate or what is holy or unholy." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 171). Because of this simple faith and purity of mind a child alone can get attached and detached both at the same time. In the same manner a man who has seen God, he also becomes like a child, without any attachment whatsoever.

With reference to the 'burning' from attachment, Sri Ramakrishna too has a very apt saying which says: "All such things as attachment to the world and enthusiasm for lust and gold disappear after the attainment of knowledge of Brahman. Then comes the cessation of all passions. When the log burns, it makes the crackling noise and one sees the flame. But when the burning is over and only ashes remains, then no more noise is heard. Thirst disappears with the destruction of attachment. Finally comes peace" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 178/9) Peace that is tranquility.

In the Sufi narration about attachment it is said: "The accidental surface of this world is like a Tablet. If you have not the strength to resist the longing for the superficial things of this world, turn away from it and sit in a corner. Men and women come into life without any idea of the inner and outer worlds." Sri Ramakrishna almost spoke on parallel lines when he explained: "Ordinary people practise spiritual discipline and cultivate devotion to God: but they also become attached to the world and are caught in the glamour of lust and gold. They are like flies which sit on a flower or a sweetmeat and alight on filth as well. But the ever perfect are like bees, which alight only on flowers and sip the honey. The ever-perfect (without attachment) drink only the Nectar of Divine Bliss. They are never inclined to worldly pleasures." (Ibid. Page 196) This disinclination is NOT detachment itself exactly but is a process, a way only.

THE FIFTH VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF UNITY

Like the unity between 'ATMA' and 'PARAMATMA' of Vedanta, the Sufis also claim a kind of unity which is generally seldom noticed

amongst all other devotional religions. Mostly in the 'Bhakti' school such complete merging is not encouraged because of the strong dualistic basis or philosophy. Sufis are almost nearer rather closer to the Advaita in this regard, though it may not be hundred percent the same. Advaita philosophy may not agree but Sri Ramakrishna was certain that there is no 'Neti Neti' after the attainment of God. "Then he sees God, Maya living beings and the Universe form one whole" (Ibid Page 328)

Let us try to understand the Sufi view-point through the words of Hoopoe the wise bird : "... you will next have to cross the Valley of Unity. In this Valley, everything is broken in pieces and then unified. All who raise their heads here raise them from the same collar. Although you seem to see many beings, in reality there is only one - all make one which is complete in its unity. Again that which you see as a unity is not different from that which appears as numbers. And as the Being of whom I speak is beyond Unity and numbering, cease to think of eternity as before and after and since these two eternities have vanished, cease to speak of them. When all that visible is reduced to nothing, what is there left to contemplate?"

However Valley of Unity of Sufism resembles the Advaitic notion of Unity in that it believes in the complete merger of the particulars in the wholeness of the reality which is One. Sri Ramakrishna's typical example in this regard is very interesting here to note. He was of the opinion that "God includes the Universe and its living beings" - this no academic Advaita philosopher will accept to be sure. But here at this juncture what one has to note is that Ramakrishna is not just a theologian but he is very near to the Sufi idea of Unity. This is made clear when he explains: "... suppose you have separated the shell, flesh and the seed of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it - the shell, the flesh, the seeds. Only then you can tell the real weight. The shell may be likened to the universe and the seeds to the living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-Self and

unsubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance and the shell and seeds as unsubstantial. But after the discrimination is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realizes that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and the seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all the three." (Ibid Page 328)

Now let us come back to Hoopoe once again, who mentions what happens when the spiritual seeker enters this Valley of Unity: "When the spiritual traveller enters this Valley he will disappear and be lost to sight because the Unique Being will manifest himself: he will be silent because the Being will speak." What will happen then? As if to reply to such a question Hoopoe was ready with the answer: "The part will become the whole or rather, there will be neither part nor whole. In the School of Secret you will see thousands of men with intellectual knowledge, their lips parted in silence. What is intellectual knowledge here? It stops on the threshold of the door like a blind child. He who discovers something of this secret turns his face from the Kingdom of two worlds. The Being I speak of does not exist separately: everyone is this Being, existence and non-existence is this Being."

Sri Ramakrishna has spoken time and again like this through songs which were so dear to him: he preached that such an experience of 'Unity' cannot be described by any scriptures nor by any philosophy for they are mostly abstract and dry. We need not quote his views again and again for the reasons of space and to avoid unnecessary complications. Even the famous Attar was asked - "Leave your metaphorical discourses" to return to the mysterious Valley of Unity!

In fact, there are no two worlds and the Master tells us that: "The phenomenal world belongs to that very Reality to which the Absolute belongs, to the very Reality to which the Phenomenal world belongs. He who is realized as God has also become the Universe and its living beings. One who knows the Truth knows that it is He alone who has become father and mother, child and neighbour, man and animal, good and bad, holy and unholy and so forth."

After listening to the Master some one intervened and asked the question: "Then there is no virtue and no sin?" Sri Ramakrishna replied: "They both exist and also do not exist. If God keeps the ego in a man, then He keeps in him the sense of differentiation and also the sense of virtue and sin. But in a rare few cases He (God) completely effaces the ego and these go beyond virtue and sin, good and bad. As long as a man has not realised God, he retains the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad. You may say 'virtue and sin are same to me. I am doing only as God bids me' But you know in your heart of hearts that these are mere words. No sooner you commit an evil deed than you feel a palpitation in your heart. Even after God has been realised God keeps the sense of differentiation even in such a devotee." (Ibid Page 328).

Similarly there is a Sufi parable which narrates: "Someone asked a man of understanding - 'What is this world? What can it be compared to?' He replied: 'This world, which is compounded of horrors and crime is like a palm-tree of wax, adorned with hundred colours. If you squeeze the tree it becomes a lump of wax..... if there is Unity there cannot be duality, neither 'I' nor 'thou' has significance.'" Then he concluded: "But what is the use of my words, though they come from the depth of my soul, if you do not ponder over them." It seems there is also another saying of Shaikh Bu Ali Dakkah: "Whoever is not immersed in the ocean of Unity is not worthy of the race of men." Sri Ramakrishna joins them when he says: "....the purpose of human life is God realization - i.e. Unity of man with God." Dakkah has also said: "If you make yourself secure (protected) against these unclean creatures (serpents of the hell and scorpions stinging the body!) you may remain tranquil; if not they will sting you even in the dust of the tomb until the day of reckoning."

THE SIXTH VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF ASTONISHMENT AND BEWILDERMENT

Amongst the Sufis it is said, "After the Valley of Unity comes the Valley of Astonishment and Bewilderment where one is a prey to sadness and dejection." But according to Vedanta it should be the

contrary since in the Unity there is fulfillment. Naturally it should be a state of blissfulness and enlightenment. Philosophically Vedantic bliss is a great truth. However psychologically the Sufis are correct. Because of the loss of all individuality in this kind of Unity, one is likely to feel that he has become poorer and that he has thus lost his own self or individuality. It is but natural that in losing one's own realm, one's individual sense of 'ego' and a personality one is likely to feel sadness and bewilderment immediately after the merger or the unity that takes place with the infinite Cosmic aspect of the reality.

Then what happens? Obviously, "These sighs are like swords and each breath a bitter sigh: there is sorrow and lamentation and a burning eagerness. It is at once day and night." Indeed, this is a very practical description of the experience which is also very sound psychologically. In such a state of mind often opposite and impossible things happen. When this experience does take place there is not only bewilderment but astonishment also. When reason is rhythmic, limited between the cause and effect and also symmetrical mostly then how to explain many of the asymmetric experiences of the mystic world of experience? What is most paradoxical here is that these mystic experiences are mostly subjective and individualistic in trends - inspite of the merger and the unity of the individual with the Cosmic as explained just a few lines before. Astonishment and bewilderment cannot be an objective and universal experience. It is only an experience for the individual. Where is the individuality lost then?

Anyway instead of offering any explanation philosophically the Sufis prefer describing this fact as an experience merely. So they say that inspite of the 'unity', rather the Cosmic emergence and all that the individual experiences, though - "there is fire, yet a man is depressed and feels despondency." Naturally the question arises: "how, in his bewilderment, shall he continue his way?" This query is answered by saying, because" . . . he who has achieved unity, forgets all and forgets himself. If he is asked: 'Are you, or are you not? Have you or have you not the feeling of existence? Are you in the middle or in the border? Are you mortal or immortal?' to all he will reply with certainty: 'I know nothing, I understand nothing, I am unaware of myself. I am in love but with

whom I do not know. My heart is at the same time both full and empty of love."

All the supernatural and mystic experiences, beyond the mundane and socalled reason is like that, apparently dogmatic and paradoxical. Astonishments and bewilderments, all come from this beyond the reason experience which fails to get all our fulfillment and normal expectations and results. Besides, it is a kind of hangover situation between the individual and the Cosmic. Because inspite of the merger, the body is still there along with the follow-up of all the old memories and associations of the individuals. Astonishment comes from the explosion and departure of all the normal and our so-called ordinary rational experiences. It comes from a feeling of paradoxes and contradictions. This area of supernatural or mystic experience is a sandwiched zone enmeshed between the individual and the cosmic world. Our ordinary mind and its behaviour-rules do not work up there is this state.

Vedic people enjoyed it and termed it is "APURVA" - the novel aspect of the experience. Religions every where were enamoured of this novelty and miracles, extra-cosmic super-natural factor. Alas, man is so tiny before it and sometimes craved it to be the real knowledge. They called it by different names to suit the situations - super-natural, mystic, occult, psychic, siddhas, miracles etc. etc. It is a fact that beyond this sensuous world everything is astonishing. Man with his intellect however has sought to explain many things rationally but it has to be admitted that as yet intellect is not the last word about the Reality. Intuition is there beyond this realm of intellection.

According to Sri Ramakrishna: "That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of Not this, Not this, (Neti/Neti) is found to have the universe and all its living beings. The Vijnani sees that the Reality which is Nirguna - without attributes is also saguna - with attributes." Otherwise, "There is nothing in scholarship. The object of study is to find means of knowing God and recognise HIM. A holy man had a book. When asked what it contained, he opened it and showed that on all the pages were written the words:

'OM RAMA' and nothing else. The man had all he wanted and expected in those two words and so there was no need for any other words.

THE SEVENTH VALLEY : THE VALLEY OF DEPRIVATION AND DEATH

Thus Hoopoe continued: "Last of all comes the Valley of Deprivation and Death, which is almost impossible to describe. The essence of this Valley is forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness and distraction: the thousand shadows which surround you disappear in a single ray of the Celestial Sun. When the ocean of immensity begins to heave, the pattern on its surface loses its form, and this pattern is no other than the world present and the world to come. Whoever declares that he does not exist acquires great merit" These words of Hoopoe reminds of the saying of Sri Ramakrishna when he said in Bengali 'Ami Moley Ghuchibey Janjal' - with the death of 'I', the dirt goes away" How true indeed!

Gita while comparing an immortal Being with the Sun has said: "If the splendour of the thousand Suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of that mighty Being" (GITA Chap. XI/12) Vedic Mantras are there speaking of this mighty Sun of life and the immensity of the oceanic depth and expanse. Life cannot be considered as that small and short as to end-up here with the physical death of the body. Hoopoe, therefore went on explaining: "The drop that becomes part of this great ocean abides there for ever and in peace. In this calm sea, a man at first experiences only humiliation and overthrow; but when he emerges from this state he will understand it as creation and many secrets will be revealed to him".

In Gita also, Arjuna tells Lord Krishna what he saw when Lord Krishna appeared in Visvarupa Darsana (vision of the Cosmic Form): "I saw, truly, as the many torrents of rivers rush towards the ocean, so do these heroes in the world of men fling themselves into Your fiercely flaming mouths." The rivers that emerge from mountains have no alternative but to rush to empty themselves in the ocean similarly the rulers of the earth while they are planning for their permanent

domination over the earth they are caught in the death-trap of Destiny. Immortality beyond death is not only like the ocean or Sun, death is like the moth embracing the Fire of love.

There is a very touching Sufi story about this fire of love. There were two moths living in a forest. One moth: intoxicated with love threw himself on the flame, with his forelegs he took hold of the flame and united himself joyously with her. He embraced her completely and his body became as red as fire. The wise moth, who was watching from far off, saw that the flame and the moth appeared to be one, and he said: 'He has learnt what he wished to know; but only he understands, and one can say no more!"

Gita uses Arjuna to put forward similar conception when Arjuna tells Lord Krishna: "As moths rush headlong into a blazing fire for destruction, so do these creatures hurriedly speed into your mouths for their destruction" And "Swallowing all the worlds on every side with Thy flaming mouths, Thou art licking Thy lips. Thy fierce rays, filling the whole world with radiance, are burning, O Vishnu"

As if to focus the inability of a mere man to realise all the aspects of this Cosmic being, as a last resort Arjuna prays to HIM: "Tell me who thou art, fierce in form. Salutation to Thee, O Supreme Deva! Have mercy. I desire to know Thee, O Primeval One. I know not indeed Thy purpose." (Gita Chp. XXI Slokas: 28,29 & 30)

We find similar sentiments expressed a plenty in Sufi literature for instance in the story titled 'THE PRINCE AND THE BEGGAR" the language of prayer goes almost in Upanishadic form: "O you, who at once exist and are yet a non-entity, whose happiness is mingled with unhappiness, if you have never experienced unrest, how will you appreciate tranquility? You stretch out your hand towards the lightening and are stopped by the swept up heaps of snow. Strive valiantly, burn reason and give yourself up to folly. If you wish to use the alchemy reflect a little and by my example, renounce yourself: withdraw from your wandering thoughts into your soul so that you may come to spiritual poverty. As for me, who am neither I nor not-I, I have strayed from myself and I find another remedy than despair." Of course

Upanishads would never have allowed this ending up in or with any such thing as 'despair'. In death there may be and in fact is somekind of despair - but death is not an end in itself. Beyond the death there is immortal infinite divinity - which Sufism has failed to envisage as in all Vedic religions. The idea of immortal-bliss and eternal freedom has not struck its deeper roots it seems in most of the Sufi literature. One can feel and observe it only when one makes a conscious study of it.

However Sri Ramakrishna prefers to differ when he says: "Oh no, that's not so. A lover of god does not burn himself to death, like a moth. The light to which he rushes is like the light of a gem. That light is brilliant no doubt, but it is also cooling and soothing. That light does not scorch his body, it gives him joy and peace" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Page 862). No wonder, the words of one of his favourite songs ran thus; 'Dive deep, O mind, in the ocean of God's beauty: If you descent to the uttermost depths, there you will find the gem of love' The Master went on to re-assure: "... now dive deep into the ocean of God. There is no fear from plunging into this ocean, for this is the ocean of immortality. Don't think that this will make you lose your head. Never for a moment harbour the idea that by thinking too much of God one becomes insane."

He said once to Narendra (later the famous Swami Vivekananda) his disciple: "look here my boy. God is the ocean of Bliss. Don't you want to plunge into this ocean?" On hearing from Narendra that there lurked a fear in him that he would be completely lost in the ocean of Satchidananda, Sri Ramakrishna pointed out: "It is the ocean of Immortality. By plunging into it a man does not die: he becomes immortal. Man does not lose his consciousness by being mad about God" (Ibid/Page 455/6).

We find that most of the Sufis are like the devotees of God, may or may not be fully a Jnani according to Hindu philosophy. But to Sri Ramakrishna it is in accordance of one of the five moods by which "an aspirant tries to know Him in relation corresponding to one or the other of these moods he assumes himself" (Ramakrishna the Great Master page 251) Here it is of Dasya Bhava and the Master said :... the

devotee generally does not seek the knowledge of the Absolute. He would rather have the consciousness that God is the Master and he the servant or that God is the Divine Mother and he the child" the latter comes under the Vatsalya Bhava. (Gospel page 171)

And it is said that the path of discrimination and knowledge is a very difficult path than all other paths. Finally advocating the giving up of all despair and fear about death, Sri Ramakrishna sang:

To arms! To arms! O Man! Death storms your house in battle array!

Bearing the quiver of Knowledge mount the chariot of devotion,

Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow string of love

And aim at the shaft of Mother Kali's holy name!

Continuing he said: "What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name. God alone is the Doer. I say: O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me . . . I am the machine and thou art the operator . . . Give your power of attorney to God. One does not come to grief through letting a good man assume one's responsibilities. Let His Will be done." He agreed that the sorrow caused by the death of near and dear ones was so intense that it pierced through the very bones; however his advice was to take everything with equanimity and said; "But, house, wife and children are transitory (momentary) existence. The palm-tree alone is real. One or two fruits have dropped off. Why lament?"

According to the Master: "God is engaged in three kinds of activity: creation, preservation and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed. Nothing will remain.... At that time the Divine Mother will gather up the seeds for the future creation, even as the elderly mistress of the house keeps in her hotchpotch-pot little bags of cucumber seeds, 'sea-foam', blue pills and other miscellaneous things. The Divine Mother will take Her seeds out again at the time of new creation (Ibid. Page 209)."

Now, coming back to the Conference of the Birds and Hoopoe's address to them about the Path Way to God, it is reported that many amongst the birds who listened to the proceedings of the Conference and the discourse by Hoopoe were overcome by sorrow that their heads dropped down and sorrow pierced their hearts. So great was their sorrow and helplessness that many of them fell down dead then and there and amongst others who did undertook the journey very few could reach this Summit beyond death. Indian scriptures amongst others also agree that the way is difficult and only very few can reach the goal amongst thousands of such pilgrims.

So whether it is Sufi way or any other way - the Path way to God is the same and there is no short-cut or easy and comfortable way to reach the summit as it is misconstrued by many ordinary people who waver on the right path in search of an easier and convenient pathway now and then which alas they will never find.

EPILOGUE:

With this booklet on the "SADHANA - THE PATH WAY TO GOD" we come to the concluding part of the series (I to III) on the 'Conference of Birds'. In these series an attempt has been made to give an insight into the periphery of the Sufi philosophy as such and also to draw the attention of the reader to the similarity of Sri Ramakrishna's views to Sufism by freely quoting his sayings with suitable anecdotes and incidents. Sri Ramakrishna, a true Representative of the Bhagvad Dharma has made many subtle spiritual notions clear and lucid by his humane approach to something so very mystic and abstract, We are hoping to bring out few more similar booklets going deeper into the subject - mostly philosophical and religious in the days to come. Of course the main theme will centre round Sufism and the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda.

The reader who has gone through these series would have found out how the Dervishes of Sufism and Sri Ramakrishna have utilised nature and her forces as the central theme for their respective philosophies. For instance the dominance of the 'AIR' - across the water and the earth and the sun and the moon (Fire) are the main factors around which all

that has to be conveyed to the disciples are told in the Upanishads. Similarly in Sufism, the Valley of Life (Vital-force) has been symbolised in the birds and the folk-lore type of literature as has been done in the present 'Conference of the Birds' in a very simple and effective manner. Chandogya Upanishad has in a very classical manner depicted this meditation - rather the gathering up of the Cosmic in the very personal life spiritually. One may have the uneasy feeling that the depth of spirituality as enumerated in the Conference of Birds' has not gone very deep. Never mind. One has to agree, however, that this inspiring and simple to grasp piece of story has served a great purpose when one goes by the appreciation expressed by many readers. It must have touched many a heart and drawn a tear or two at the appeal of Hoopoe, the wise bird to his brethren to take to the path of spirituality and reach the Simurgh. His appeal is the embodiment of a spiritual love of the kind these Sufis were trying to spread throughout their life. Obviously this is a mythic form of many ancient and folk religions.

Coming back to Chandogya Upanishad, one of our oldest scriptures which says: "Then follows the meditation on the personal. The vital force is indeed the place of the merger. When he (a person/seeker) sleeps, his speech surely repairs into the Vital Force, the eyes into the Vital Force, the ears into the Vital Force, the mind into the Vital Force for it is the Vital force which swallows up all these" And "These two which are such, that are surely the two places of merger - air indeed in the case of Gods and the Vital Force in the case of organs." (Chandogya Upanishad IV/3/3 & 4).

Thus we find in the same Upanishad the connections rather the coming together of the entire Adi-Bhautika and the Adi-Daivika in favour of an Adhyatmika through 'Prana'. And in this process: "Air is the place of merger, for when fire goes out it repairs into air alone, when the sun sets it repairs into air indeed, when the moon sets it repairs into air, Similarly: "When waters dry up, they surely repair into air, because it is air indeed that swallow up all these. This is on the Divine plane." (Ibid/1- 2)

Sri Ramakrishna was one of the greatest swans (PARAMA HAMSA) who was so very adept in such God-love - so mad and earnest amongst many birds (souls) that the world has very seldom come across. A real liberator indeed.

The main purpose in bringing out these series is to stress the importance of meditation (ADHYATMA) and the secret of offering oneself in meditation as spiritual food to Prajapati. Indeed a man of knowledge himself becomes an offering - becomes food as Virat and an eater of food as Krti both at the same time. Because everything in this Universe is connected as an offering only, in a chain process with the highest and so it is considered not always holy to receive any charity from another. The wise bird Hoopoe calls out to his ignorant and selfish brethren to reach out to Simurgh - the God and our Upanishads call out to us to march on to the 'ADHYATMA' for this Adhyatma is the fulfilment of life and also urges us not to be misled in the pursuit of anything temporal or evanescent.

Here in this connection about giving and receiving charity we can recount a tale from the Chandogya Upanishad. It seems there lived a person by name Janasruti Pautrayana who made gifts with respect, who gave liberally and who had food cooked for others. He built resthouses all round, thinking 'Everywhere people will eat of my food'. One summer evening while he was strolling on the terrace of his palace, he heard two swans talking while flying. One warned the other saying: ". . . be careful, the effulgence of Janasruti Pautrayana has spread like the day light. Do not come in touch with it, lest it should scorch you." The other swan was not impressed by this praise of his companion of Janasruti and so said: "Lo, how could you so describe him as if he was Raikva with cart." (Meaning thereby that none could surpass Raikva in charity). Janasruti was naturally surprised to note that somebody else surpassed him in charity and wanted to know who it could be. So he sent reliable messengers in all directions to find out who this Raikva was and where he lived. After a long search one of the messengers found Raikva "sitting under a cart and scratching eruptions on his skin" The messenger on his return informed Janasruti about Raikva and Janasruti" . . . took with him six hundred cows, a gold

necklace and a chariot drawn by mules" and met Raikva and after presenting him with all these requested him" about the deity whom you worship." Raikva looked at the presents with contempt and said: ..O, you Sudra (according to Brahmasutra the word 'sudra' is to be taken in the etymological sense meaning one who is dissolved with sorrow - on hearing the glory of Raikva) let this gold necklace and other things remain with you." So Janasruti appears again and again with more and more presents and only when he presents his daughter to Raikva, his kingdom and all other things he agrees to impart the knowledge. What this story reveals is the qualifications of a proper recipient of charity. According to the Chandogya Upanishad the person should: ". . . be a Brahma-carin, who gave wealth in return, who was intelligent, who had knowledge of the Vedas, who was liked and who reciprocated with a different knowledge."

Perhaps the idea was also to impress upon the futility of eating and living on somebody's charity and as such could not be possibly the aim of anyone, then what to speak of the Rishis (saints) who were almost at the end of their spiritual search for the highest in life. In fact they had offered themselves to Virat. Raikva had also after so much testing of Jana Sruti passed on the secret knowledge of offering oneself in meditation as spiritual food to Prajapati. Indeed a man of knowledge himself becomes an offering when he thus offers himself in meditation (ADHYATMA) He becomes food as Virat and also at the same time the eater of the food as Krata.

Sri Ramakrishna also has again and again reminded us by saying that charity and service cannot be the ultimate end. Offering is Yajna only in spiritual life which Swami Vivekananda has rightly termed as 'give' as against the 'take'. The Master himself was a great messenger of 'ADHYATMA' and 'ADHYATMA' only, being in the great tradition of the Upanishads that took the form of Bhagavad- Dharma in later period for the sake of us, the ordinary and common people at large. And it is very pertinent to know that it was never a compromise of those wisest principles of life that the shrutis have prescribed in the yonder days and Acharyas have interpreted according to the needs of contemporary times and its subsequent journey through different

climes, regions and rhymes. Otherwise the great principles of all religions are all the same - universal and perennial- the ADHYATMA!

Thus we find in Chandogya Upanishad, the tradition of passing on the spiritual knowledge through stories and knowledge gained from nature and surroundings - plants, animals, air, earth rain etc. etc. This feeling of oneness with sub-human life is characteristic of the Vedanta and has formed basis for many a popular folk-lore. Of course this is not purely mythic. Thus we find in Ch. IV. Section 7 of Chandogya Upanishad a bull from the herd given to Satyakama to be looked after and which was feared to be possessed by some God of the Air disclosing to him (Satyakama the disciple) one part of the Truth. The bull told Satyakama "The eastern quarter is one part, the western quarter is one part, the southern quarter is one part, the northern part is one part. This indeed, dear boy, is one foot of Brahman, consisting four parts, named the 'MANIFEST' (PRAKASH)

The second part was disclosed by the Fire in the same manner as 'ETERNAL', infinite or limitless (ANANTA)

The third part of this Knowledge was disclosed by a Swan as the 'RESPLENDENT' - the brightest (Jyoti)

Atlast a diver bird called Madguh in sanskrit - (similar to the 'Pan-kouti' the black swan type bird very often mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna while narrating tales) came and instructed Satyakama about the 4th and remaining part of the discourse as having a body or abode (AYATANA.) This abode or repository here is the mind, for the mind is the support or repository of the experiences presented through all the organs.

The Chandogya Upanishad further says that "he who knows this one foot of Brahman consisting of four parts thus, and meditates on it as the Repository or Abode, becomes repository (i.e. with proper abode) in this world. He who knows this one foot of Brahman consisting of four parts thus, and meditates on it as the Respository wins the repository (i.e. extensive) regions (in the next world.)."

But yet inspite of this knowledge thus acquired - knowledge acquired from the 'Teacher or Guru' in direct probationership becomes more stable and useful, than these story-forms of teaching, for Satyakama himself tells his Guru that "I have definitely heard from persons like your venerable self that the knowledge directly learnt from one's own teacher becomes most beneficial." (Chap. Up. IV:9:3).



Then the fires collectively said, "The Brahmacharin endowed with austerity has served us well. If it pleases you, we shall instruct him." To him, they said; "Prana (the vital force is Brahman, Ka (Bliss) is Brahman, Kha (space) is Brahman.... That which is Ka is verily Kha and that which is Kha is verily Ka." (IV/10/4-5). Thus marking the importance of Vayu (Air) and the space only in our lives which have to cross across as 'time' also in order to reach the infinite and eternal aspect of the reality.

